

HELMS REGRETS LETTER

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Senators Get CIA Apology

By CECIL HOLLAND

Star Staff Writer

CIA Director Richard M. Helms today publicly apologized for a letter which got him in Dutch with the Senate and brought a demand for his resignation.

"I regret having signed the letter," Helms said. "I apologize for it. I made a mistake."

Helms made the statement on leaving a closed Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing at which he also expressed his regret.

The letter was sent to the St. Louis Globe Democrat and praised an editorial which was severely critical of Sen. J. William Fulbright, D-Ark., the committee chairman. The letter appeared in last Wednesday's Globe Democrat.

Called Fulbright "Crafty"

The editorial, describing Fulbright as "crafty," said he had received his "comeuppance" in a July 14 Senate vote denying his committee a role in overseeing CIA affairs.

A furor over the letter broke out yesterday when Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy, D-Minn., called the matter to the attention of the Senate.

Asked today if he had considered resigning, the 53-year-old Helms gave a fleeting smile and turned away without answering.

Before the hearing, Sen. Wayne Morse, D-Ore., had demanded Helms' resignation from the position he has filled for only a month. He was formerly CIA deputy director.

No Support for Demand

Fulbright and other committee members said Helms had given a satisfactory explanation of the letter and there was no support for Morse's demand.

Morse, busy at another hearing dealing with the airline strike, was not present at the meeting. At his request, his statement demanding that Helms resign was read at the hearing.

Fulbright reported that Helms acknowledged signing the letter which originated with an assistant who drafted it.



RICHARD M. HELMS



J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT

At today's hearing on controversial letter.

According to Fulbright, Helms explained that he had quite a number of other letters before him and his attention did not focus as thoroughly as it should have on the letter to the Globe Democrat and a clipping of the editorial that was attached to it.

Such Letters Not the Practice

Helms told the committee, Fulbright said, that he did not make a practice of writing such letters and the CIA takes no position on matters of a political nature such as were involved in the editorial.

Helms indicated, according to Fulbright, that his attention was centered on a part of the editorial commending the CIA.

After the hearing, Fulbright said "I don't wish to pursue the matter." He added that it was closed "as far as I am concerned."

Fulbright said there was a discussion involving other matters and that Helms was "forthright in his replies. For that reason, he said the incident of the letter was salutary.

In the Senate discussion yesterday on the letter, Fulbright expressed fears that the CIA was involving itself in domestic affairs.

He mentioned that he had heard rumors the agency had involved itself in elections in labor unions.

Helms was asked about that, Fulbright said.

"they do not involve themselves directly, in domestic labor affairs."

Fulbright offered no elaboration and said: "I don't think I should pursue that further." He also said that Helms "testified positively" the CIA had not used the Fulbright exchange program in its operations.

McCarthy Is Satisfied

McCarthy said he thought Helms had given "a quite satisfactory explanation."

Asked if the fact that Helms signed the letter raised any question as to his judgment, McCarthy replied: "I don't think it comes to that point." He also said he did not think Helms should resign.

Morse, in his statement, said Helms could best serve the country by resigning.

"Until he does," Morse added, "the American people cannot rest secure in the belief that the agency is living up to its legal mandate not to operate within the United States or influence or participate in affairs within the United States."

Asks Panel Part in Watch

It must be assumed, Morse said, that the Helms letter is "only a small segment of what is going on that is unsigned or unrevealed as to its CIA source."

He added that this was another reason why the Foreign Relations Committee must re-

new its insistence on having a voice in overseeing the CIA.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana said he thought Helms "made a mistake and admitted it . . . he faced up to it . . . it must be a good lesson."

He pointed out that Helms came in as the one who appeared best qualified for director and should be given a chance.

"We all make mistakes," Mansfield added. "If we all had to resign when we make mistakes, the whole Senate would have to resign."

In the letter to the Globe Democrat, Helms had said:

"I want to let you know of my pleasure in reading the editorial 'Brickbats for Fulbright' in the Globe-Democrat of July 18.

"It reflects so well your paper's policy of printing news impartially, supporting what it believes to be right and opposing what it believes to be wrong without regard to party politics."

Express Shock

After McCarthy told the Senate of the letter yesterday, four members of the watchdog committee who had opposed the Fulbright group's proposal joined with others in expressing shock that the CIA director had written such a letter, and in praising Fulbright.

The Senate discussion occurred one month to the day after Helms had been confirmed unanimously as director of the intelligence agency and praised as one of its most valued officials.

While the floor discussion went on, Sen. Leverett Saltonstall, R-Mass., a member of the watchdog committee, talked with Helms by telephone. He came back and reported Helms as saying there was only one letter and he was sorry that it had been written.

Telephones Fulbright

Thirty minutes after the Senate's indignation round ended, Helms telephoned Fulbright to say he was sorry and that the letter was a mistake. He also said he would be glad to talk to Fulbright's committee at any time. That statement led to today's hearing.

McCarthy, sponsor of the resolution for the Foreign Relations Committee to have a voice in CIA affairs, said yesterday it was "entirely out of place for Helms to have signed a letter praising an editorial which attacked him."

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